

ON THE NET

Cooperative Learning Activities for the Foreign Language Classroom

Jean W. LeLoup

SUNY Cortland

Robert Ponterio

SUNY Cortland

Diligent searching on the World Wide Web (WWW) can result in the location of pages offering language learning activities that are ready-made by language teachers, are freely available, and can immediately serve educators as instructional, enrichment, and/or review tools. The present column describes in detail one such site that was created by a foreign language (FL) educator in Canada who took an educational methodology and devised activities in concert. Pete Jones is the Head of Modern Languages at Pine Ridge Secondary School in Pickering, Ontario. Mr Jones has created a myriad of activities for use in high school classes, all of which have one common theoretical underpinning: Cooperative Learning.

What is Cooperative Learning?

Cooperative learning has been around for quite some time, and a considerable amount of research has been carried out demonstrating the results of its use literally across the curriculum. Certainly the work and writings of Robert E. Slavin of Johns Hopkins University or David and Roger Johnson of the University of Minnesota are well known. In particular, much has been written concerning Cooperative Learning and its effects with bilingual students in ESL/LEP classes and with foreign and second language learners in general. Foreign Language teachers should consult this extant database when determining whether or not to embrace this educational theory in their own classrooms. The WWW can assist here with some sites pinpointing pertinent references:

<http://cisl.ospi.wednet.edu/CISL/Strategies/COOPLEARNS.html>

(offers cooperative learning resources from the ERIC database; many pertain to second and foreign language learners)

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/At-Risk/cdspubs.html#p7123>

(lists publications and research articles on Cooperative Learning with several emphasizing language minority students)

Cooperative Learning Activities for Foreign Language Learners











Mr. Jones has taken the educational theory of Cooperative Learning and used it as the basis for several creative activities used successfully in his FL classrooms. The activities are offered in a variety of languages (English, French, German, and Spanish) and can be easily adapted for others. His goals (in his own words) in creating these activities are several:

- Share with teachers materials and ideas that have worked well in the modern languages classroom.
- Create materials and exercises which can be printed out from the different sites and used by teachers the very next day in their classes.

- Create on-line treasure hunts on the different holiday pages, which allow teachers to integrate a little bit of technology in the modern language classroom. (Teachers can take their students to the computer lab and have them try the activities or can give them as assignments to be done at home.)
- Have fun with language and interactive crossword puzzles, multiple choices, unscramble sentences and cloze activities (courtesy of the wonderful Hot Potatoes programme.)

YOU BE THE JUDGE!

is a series of cooperative learning jigsaws where fairy tale characters are put on trial. This activity can be printed out for an instant lesson plan for advanced language classes.

Le Petit Chaperon Rouge 	Rotkäppchen 
Little Red Riding Hood 	Caperucita Roja 
Cendrillon 	Cenicienta 
Cinderella 	Boucles d'Or 
Goldilocks 	Cenerentola 

Several language choices are offered. Once on the page, one clicks on the flag for the language of choice. Students discuss the roles of the characters from the fairy tale and come to a verdict which must be justified to the class.

PHRASES MAGIQUES

is a cooperative reading and writing activity which reinforces the vocabulary and some grammar points of new units. It is adaptable to the teacher's particular text book. Students create sentences in pairs using the words in a grid by moving through adjoining cells in the grid.

CINQ AMIS

is a very challenging reading comprehension activity. It must be adapted to the class' particular text. Students read or listen to clues about five characters and collect information in a table that will later allow them to answer questions about these individuals.

[Zaubersätze](#) is the German version of Phrases Magiques and a [Die Fünf Freunde](#) is the German version of Cinq Amis.

MON AMI IMAGINAIRE

is a great class building activity that takes little preparation to set up. A student describes an imaginary friend to another student who in turn describes the friend to another, and so on. At the end of the activity we see how much the descriptions have changed through repetition.

FLIP IT!

is a neat way to increase student-student interaction and talk time in the foreign language classroom. Students work in pairs to describe someone or tell a story. All of the pairs talk at the same time, but only one student in the pair talks. Whenever the teacher says "Flip it!," the other student in the pair takes over talking.

Mr. Jones also has a section devoted to holiday themes. These pages have fun activities for language learners as well as links to other sites that provide a wealth of cultural information about the holidays.

[Christmas](#)

[Valentines](#)

[Easter](#)

[Halloween](#)

[Mothers Day](#)

[Fathers Day](#)

The samples above do not exhaust the pages Pete Jones has created for his FL colleagues to use, including Sight Passages, Découvrons Le Canada, Viajes De Descubrimiento, Das Gold Der Alten Dame, Le Petit Nicolas, and An Activity For Remembrance Day. They do, however, provide FL educators with a place to begin if they wish to incorporate Cooperative Learning in their classroom to enhance student learning. These pages are illustrative of the time and effort one can invest in planning creative lessons for the FL classroom. Much work has already been done here for us. FL teachers and learners will certainly benefit from a visit to these sites.